

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 041 365

EA 002 911

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TITLE Political Systems Analysis and Research in Educational Administration: Can the Emperor Be Clothed?
PUB DATE 6 Feb 69
NOTE 32p.; Paper prepared for presentation at The American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (Los Angeles, February 5-8, 1969)
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.25 HC-\$1.70
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis, *Conceptual Schemes, *Educational Policy, *Methodology, Operations Research, Research Design, Systems Analysis, *Systems Approach, Theories

ABSTRACT

Two elements are necessary in any systems theory. The first is a correct definition of the structure of the system in question; the second is an explication of the processes of the system functions over time. A comparative methodology is required for understanding changes in a system over time and for defining differences between two or more systems. The most promising type of systems theory applicable to educational policy making is political systems analysis. This type of systems approach concerns the relationship of a system--education in this case--to the larger society, and the allocation of resources within the particular system. Systems theory, as applied to education, has failed to produce useful results, largely because current systems approaches to policy making in education have failed either to conceptualize correctly the nature of the system or to employ comparative methodologies as an aid to understanding their processes, or both. Systems analysis may become useful in a theory of educational polity, but much more rigorous conceptualizations of systems and their boundaries, together with the adoption of a comparative methodology, must be undertaken. (RA)

ED041365

Political Systems Analysis and Research in Educational Administration:

Can the Emperor be Clothed?

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A system is a big black box
Of which we can't unlock the locks,
And all we can find out about
Is what goes in and what comes out.

Perceiving input-output pairs,
Related by parameters,
Permits us, sometimes, to relate
An input, output, and a state.
If this relation's good and stable
Then to predict we may be able,
But if this fails us-heaven forbid!
We'll be compelled to force the lid!

Boulding

A paper prepared for presentation at the annual meeting of
The American Educational Research Association
Los Angeles, February 5 - 8, 1969

The assistance of Charles Enos in the development
of this paper is respectfully acknowledged

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Political Systems Analysis and Research in Education Administration: Can the Emperor be Clothed?

Introduction

This paper is divided into six sections. In the introduction an effort is made to specify the arena of discourse, primarily through a discussion of what the paper is not about. A second section seeks to suggest the common understanding, status, appeal, and applications of systems analysis within the discipline of political science. As this discussion is not of direct relevance to the argument of this paper we will give it only passing attention at this Symposium. The third section tries to substantiate the disappointing results of efforts to apply political systems analyses to problems of educational administration, notably school politics. The fourth and fifth sections deal, respectively, with the conceptual and methodological difficulties in applying the political systems approach to phenomena of greatest interest to us, and with the yet to be tapped utility of the political systems approach. "A Plea for Modesty," the final section, seeks to draw together the strands of the argument into a reasonably tidy concluding statement.

What, Exactly, Are We Talking About? Why?

"Systems analysis" may refer to at least three, usually unrelated, levels of analysis. Operations research is characterized by the high specificity of objectives and organizations or organizational units and may be illustrated by reference to PERT, PPBS, and traditional cost-benefit analysis.¹ General systems theory, on the

other hand, seeks to attain a high level of generality, and presumes applicability to all social phenomena. General systems theory is multidisciplinary and seeks to provide a theoretical frame work that accommodates the major concepts of all social science disciplines. The work of Talcott Parsons is representative of general systems theory.²

Political systems analysts generally operate at a middle level of abstraction somewhere between operations research and general system theory, though toward the general systems end of the continuum. David Easton and Gabriel Almond have been the seminal political systems theorists. Easton's central concern has been definition of the political system -- that system which allocates "values" authoritatively -- and examination of the question, "What processes what set of relationships among members of the system, enable the system to persist in a changing environment?" Almond has sought to identify the functions performed by all political systems and to categorize and seek to explain nation-states according to the processes and institutional relationships by which these functions are performed.

It is important to note that these are not questions of direct relevance to the study of educational policy making. Our questions concern the relationship of the educational system to the larger society and the authoritative allocation of values within the educational system. Nevertheless, the conceptual framework developed by Easton, Almond and other political systems analysts is much closer to our needs than the work of the program, planners and bugdeters or the general systems theorists.

It is to the political systems approach then, that those of us interested in educational policy making necessarily turn for assistance. And it is because we have been looking to this approach with frequency and fervor that this paper seemed a useful

undertaking last summer. Judging from the present AERA Program, interest in systems analysis of all types is increasing and the notion of questioning exactly what we have been able to purchase through our efforts to adapt the political systems approach seems timely. It is contended that we have been able to purchase little new understanding with the coin of political systems analysis. We will seek to substantiate this contention, and then to ask why this has been the case, and whether it must continue to be the case.

Paths Not Taken

There are several well-worn paths for those wishing to challenge the systems approach. In the following paragraphs we have sketched their general argument and provided citations which will assist those interested in continued pursuit. We have not adopted these criticisms either because they seem a now pointless attack upon the over-enthusiasm of earlier analysts or because they do not relate closely to special problems in the application of political systems analysis to educational phenomena.

One critical approach emphasizes the "after all, it's nothing new" technique for dismissing contemporary efforts.³ It is true that political scientists have made reference to systems in the sense of inter-related components at least since Hobbes' Leviathan (1651), just as we have referred to school systems for many years. In neither political science nor education however, has there been a previous effort made to utilize the "system" as the central concept in construction of a theoretical framework.

A second argument not endorsed here is that which puts the political system "above" all other systems and is critical of more timorous approaches. "The political system is more important, more encompassing, and "greater" than the social system."⁴ The justification for this assertion is that political action transforms society, rather than the other way about. Given an appropriate definition of "political", the assertion is but a tautology that what action is taken to transform society is action taken to transform society. Moreover, it suggests that the political system is really the general system; this is too provincial for most of us.

Criticism of political systems because of their analogical-biological origins can be most compelling and we have borrowed heavily upon this general school in our own criticism. There is, nevertheless, one aspect of this school that is most aggravating. In his discussion of "analogical approaches" to political science, Van Dyke suggests that several writers have examined the notion and concluded with "so what?"⁵ Yet on inspection it proves to be the case that "so what" refers to the obvious failure of human behavior to be analogous to any given biological system.⁶ Very well. We can use this criterion, however, only at the cost of maligning the work of contemporary political systems analysts who know very well that Londoners do not in all instances behave as slime mold.

The final argument into which we will not venture is that which we will refer to as the distinction between functional systems and adaptive or dynamic systems. This issue is joined by Morton Kaplan who pits the Parsonian system against the Ashbian system, and judges Ross Ashby's Design for a Brain the victor.⁷ The issue, partly ideological, seems to boil down to the question of whether functionalism is

Inherently conservative. Goldschmidt's argument is representative of the challenge:

.....emphasis on the equilibrium mode of analysis, on functionalism and on systems, tends to concentrate attention on stability rather than change and to ignore historical developments. It also tends to see anything which exists, particularly if it has existed for a long time, as functional and system - sustaining and, hence, good.⁸

One reason for avoiding this argument is that a political scientist, William Mitchell, has responded in Parson's defense and to our way of thinking has carried the day through explication of the distinction between the stable systems of Parson's early writing and the dynamic system conceptualized in Economy and Society.⁹ More important, the concern of this paper is with what we might do with political systems analysis, not what we can't do with it.

Its Appeal to Political Scientists

It is understood that not all political scientists are interested in systems analysis: some decry it;¹⁰ others ignore it, continuing to use "political system" to refer exclusively to structural aspects such as party, mayor, and legislator.¹¹ Nevertheless, David Easton, the chief proponent of political systems analysis is the current President of the American Political Science Association. The systems approach is apparently not held in ill repute within the discipline.

Although gratuitous, one may suggest that the appeal of political systems analysis lies in large measure with the assistance it provides in moving away from the legal-structural traditions of political science and toward the behavioral approach. David Easton begins the first two volumes of his trilogy on the political system by castigating his peers for the atheoretical nature of political science; he proscribes

theory and empirical methods as the cure.¹² Clearly, he believes that his use of systems analysis is theoretical and based upon the assumptions and methods of empirical science. It is also clear that his goal is behaviorism (i.e., theory and empirical methodology), and that he wishes to avoid continuation of a political science identified with law and philosophy.¹³

A second reason which might be proposed to explain the attention of the political systems approach to a number of eminent political scientists is that it serves as a useful vehicle for bringing functionalism to political science.¹⁴ Almond's work relies upon a sociological-anthropological concept of function.¹⁵ Glendon, Schubert, in stating the advantages of structural-functionalism, also suggests that he sees this approach to be synonymous with the systems approach.

This study of the judiciary is based upon an analytical framework known in sociology and political science as "systems theory" or "structural-functional analysis". This basis is chosen in preference to the legal, historical, and institutional categories that in the past have dominated inquiry into the policy-making processes of American government. A major advantage of this strategy is that it diverts attention both from a preoccupation with the substance of judicial policy and from a description of the legal structure of courts in isolation from the rest of the political system.¹⁶

The use of functionalism in political science has been examined and challenged in several places upon the customary charge that it does not explain anything.¹⁷ It is interesting to speculate upon the question of whether or not systems analysis necessarily implies functionalism. We would argue, over Eason's protestation, that it does in every instance with which we are familiar.¹⁸ Certainly, political systems analysis accommodates a functional approach.

Commonalities and Applications

R. Jean Hill's definition of the concept of system, order among phenomena, provides a common denominator for political systems analysis.¹⁹ All emphasize system -- the relationships among a set of interdependent units comprising a whole -- as the primary concept. All recognize that one must choose the actors of units deemed to comprise the system in a somewhat arbitrary, though not whimsical, fashion, and that it is the study of the relationships between these system components in responding to the environment -- the functions performed by each within the context of the system -- that is the focal point of systems analysis. All use the general systems model consisting of input, conversion process, output and feedback. Some require the concept of equilibrium.

Beyond these common aspects there is a good deal of special tailoring to meet special needs. For example, Deutsch focuses upon the notion of feedback in developing his communications model. He includes the notion of homeostasis, but it is a given rather than a key analytic concept. For Deutsch the functional aspects usually associated with political systems analysis are of marginal importance only.²⁰

The work of Easton and Kaplan may be considered jointly. Although their substantive concerns differ -- Easton seeks to develop a theoretical approach which explains the persistence of the political system while Kaplan is concerned with system variables explaining stability and instability in the international system -- both find the notion of "dynamic equilibrium" or "homeostatic equilibrium" essential.^{21,22}

Reference has previously been made to Almond's work in developing areas. He combines the input-output model with a set of questions seeking to compare

structures and processes performing political functions (e.g., rulemaking) across national and cultural boundaries.²⁸

Mitchell seeks to depict The American Polity.²⁴ Although he utilizes the input-output model, and customary meanings of boundaries and equilibrium, his work is distinguished by heavy reliance upon Parsons' AGIL functional typology in seeking to develop a general systems approach to the American political system. His primary concern is with exchanges between sub-systems of the political systems.

One of the more interesting applications of the political systems approach is Schubert's analysis of the judicial system.²⁵ He presents the customary conceptual scheme involving inputs, conversion process, outputs, feedback and boundaries. His analytic questions are functional, attributed to some earlier writing by Almond.²⁶ Schubert departs from other systems analysts through his explicit rejection of homeostasis.

It is one thing to hypothesize homeostasis - the tendency for a set of interacting systems to maintain equilibrium-in a living and healthy organism. It is quite another matter to assume that patterns of social organization and behavior, which we analogize to living organisms when we adopt the Darwinian metaphor and speak of social systems, necessarily will seek to maintain a natural balance and remain in some state of equilibrium. Although some form of homeostasis usually is explicitly assumed by social scientists who have adopted systems theory to guide their analyses, we make no such assumption here. We shall however, seek to discover the kinds of influences that both shape and lead to changes in judicial systems and the correlative kinds of influences that judicial systems bring to bear upon other systems, both public and private, with which they interact.²⁷

In this section we have discussed the appeal of systems analysis to political scientists and have shown its application to the international political system, the

political system, the American system, comparative systems; and the judicial system. We have noted a common conceptual focus upon a set of interrelated variables (the system) and the functional exchanges between the system and the environment (Inputs, conversion, feedback, outputs) and exchanges among sub-systems (Easton's withinputs). We have also noted that despite considerable commonality the systems analysts have differed with respect to the relative emphasis they accord functionalism and equilibrium.

The Political Systems Approach to Educational Politics:
Five Compelling Failures

If the question is, "What have we been able to do with the political systems approach?" the answer must be, "Not much." Although the five examples reported below to support this charge are not comprehensive, they are representative.²⁸

Campbell and Layton: The Educational Policy System

Dean Campbell and Don Layton devoted much of 1968 to the preparation of a statement of the educational policy system. Presently in draft form and titled "Policy Making for American Education," it provides an excellent statement of the educational policy system and the questions before it. In early drafts a major chapter was devoted to presentation of a "social system approach" (i.e. Easton's political systems Framework). It was intended that this chapter would provide both perspective and unity to their discussion and recommendations. In each subsequent draft, however, the relative emphasis given this chapter was reduced. In present form the effort to utilize a political system framework to assist in the

description and analysis of the educational policy system has been completely abandoned; it has been replaced by three, quite good, case studies.

Sroufe's Folley

The writer had looked toward political systems analysis, again in the Easton mold, to provide conceptual unity for a course examining policy determination in education. The first session was devoted to the systems approach and was sufficiently stimulating to students and professor that it was extended for all of the second session as well. Never again in the course of the semester was anything said that was dependent upon systems concepts, that was facilitated through the use of systems analysis, or that could profitably be discussed in terms of systems analysis.

As we will not return to consideration of this instance, it is well to account for the difficulty in using the political system approach as intended. The major difficulty seemed to be in the level of generality of Easton's work, in which education is but a sub-system. Having said that education is a sub-system of the larger political system, what does one say next? Most of our data and all of our problems, are issue-institution centered, and do not provide for easy translation to the systems framework. What one wished to say could not usefully be plugged into the systems framework. State school board members are clearly actors in the educational policy system, but what we can profess about them is independent of a system perspective and dependent upon an institutional perspective. A more extreme case: How does one usefully relate a lecture on political socialization to David Easton's

system model? It can be done, but what we wish to say about schools and the socialization process is not furthered.

(Of course, all of these problems may be related to a constant - the professor, there is no way to overcome this obstacle).

Scribner's Local Board System

Jay Scribner's work represents our pioneering effort to apply a "functional-systems" framework to a local school board.²⁹ We must applaud his conceptual labor, and perhaps even build upon it, as some of his students are presently seeking to do. But there is little reason to be elated over the insights afforded us by his functional-systems analysis. One may, without depreciating the quality or value of his conceptual work, assert that its payoff in this instance was nill. He may be correct when he states that ".....no evidence seriously impugned the applicability of the functional-systems approach itself"³⁰ But this is a negative and uninspiring defense of the utility of political systems analysis.

Meranto's National Policy System for Education

Scribner found it necessary to combine elements of both Almond and Easton; Meranto declares that he uses the systems approach of Easton and Mitchell (not really very similar, one must observe) and the legislative model developed by Wahlke.³¹

Meranto's first chapter is an excellent statement of his conceptual approach. However, he does not return again to serious consideration of the political system

concept. He has produced a very good case study in which the use of his conceptual framework is incidental; the study doesn't fail, but the political systems approach does.

R.L. Johns and the State System

R.L. Johns paper is actually closer to social systems theory than political systems analysis but as he addresses himself to the state educational political sub-system his work is included here.³² The criticism of John's paper, as with Meranto's is addressed not to the substance of his remarks, but to the failure of the systems approach to provide any additional insights. More critically, the substance of the paper would be just as good, and no different, if the two page description of systems theory - from feedback to steady- state -- were omitted.

This criticism raises the unpleasant specter that the political systems approach, like the Getzels-Guba model and the Campbell flow-chart, will be relegated to the first ten percent of the pages of any treatise and, isolated there, will have no contaminating effect on subsequent discourse.³³

Problems in Utilizing the Political Systems Approach In Educational Politics

There are two explanations for the failure of political systems analysis to work for us: 1) we have not often been fair to the ground rules of systems analysis; 2) it has some serious limitations in its own right.

A ground rule for systems analysis is that one identify the actors which define a system, and examine the exchanges among them as the system functions within its environment. If there is to be analysis of the political system thus isolated, comparison is required (e.g., time A contrasted to time B, or exchanges in system

X contrasted with exchange processes in system Y).

The failure of systems analysts in the five instances related above may be attributed in part to our failure to play according to the ground rules.

None of the uses to which the systems approach was put permitted comparative analysis. In the Campbell and Layton effort the system approach was used to emphasize certain concepts of the policy system. In neither John's paper or Sroufe's course was attention given to process: John's use was to create fear of justly deserved retribution in the state education agencies.³⁴ Sroufe's was simply to unify his varied course content. Even had the political systems approach proved helpful in this latter effort, it would have been a contribution of little moment. Although Meranto's study is concerned with exchanges between system actors and the relationships between the larger environment and the legislative structure, it is a case study and precludes comparisons. Scribner gives explicit attention to the question of conversion and exchange processes but considers one board only at one point in time only.

The preceding is simply to affirm that if we echo Meranto in asserting that the systems approach is "more useful as an organizational scheme than a predictive model," we have no reason to expect anything more.³⁵

Another "rule of the game" which we seem not to have followed is the distinction between the concept of open system as essential for understanding the meaning of external inputs and system response (i.e., to distinguish from the physical system), and the necessity of a closed system for analysis. Kaplan states the case well in reference to analysis of the interantional system.

A system consists of a set of variables related by one or more functions. Although the world is open, the systems model is always closed. Otherwise we could not know, to use Morris Cohen's phrase, how its variables are mutually implicated. The parameters of the system are held constant. We can vary the parameters selectively, however, to assess how the system will behave under different conditions. This is preferable to including the parameters in the systems as variables, for we would then have a system so complicated that we could not explicate its behavior - that is, we could not specify the rules for the relations of the variables and work out their implications.³⁶

Our problem, typified by Meranto, has been that in an effort to make meaningful statements we have been reluctant to specify the system and restrict ourselves only to the variables in the system. As a result, our statements prove less meaningful than our aspirations. For example, Meranto's description of the breakthrough in federal legislation regarding education is thoroughly reasonable, but so was the argument of Munger and Fenno that there could be no such breakthrough.³⁷ In this instance, it is only when we seek to specifically and rigorously compare system variables prior to 1965 and in 1965 that we should expect a payoff from political systems analysis. And the payoff will not be forthcoming unless we are clever enough to "close our system" and seek to experimentally manipulate the parameters (i.e., compare key function and process variables).

It is also the case that we have not sought to use all the systems approach in our work. The concept of equilibrium, for example, is generally ignored in our eclectic borrowings from the political systems analysts. Eclecticism is probably necessary, but it might be worth our while to go all the way with Easton or Deutch before we come to a final assessment of the systems approach. This is to say that the political systems analysts we have followed might not recognize our work as theirs.

Finally, we have insisted upon approaching our phenomena with a short time perspective, probably because of the pragmatic bent of our research. It may be that the longer time perspective generally associated with systems analysis would support a step-function explanation of the passage of ESEA, for example. Our preference for case studies seems to prevent us from fully exploiting this dimension of systems analysis.

There are also problems inherent in systems analysis which cause one to question the ultimate payoff of this approach, regardless of our obedience to its principles.

Most important would seem to be recognition that it is but an approach to the study of phenomena and cannot serve as a theory.

Perhaps the first thing to be said about systems theory is that it is not a theory. It consists of a set of concepts. No propositions about the real world can be derived from the infinitesimal calculus or from the methods of science in general. Advice to a political scientist to use systems theory to solve a problem, even when it is the appropriate methodology, would advance him as far but no farther than would advice to a physical scientist to use the methods of science.³⁸

We have thus been forewarned that we cannot arrive at a theory of the politics of education by adopting the systems approach. It is a method. It's assessment, then, must be in terms of what it allows us to say about phenomena of our interest that could not be said as efficiently or effectively apart from the approach.

A second area of concern might be the realization that the definition of system must always be arbitrary in the scientific sense. There can be no external criteria for inclusion or exclusion of actors; actual selection criteria are as subjective as "useful" and "interesting".³⁹

Nor is it possible to establish external validity checks upon the functional relationships between system actors. That A's behavior with regard to B has been modified can be established, but neither cause ~~or~~ system consequence may be explained. Propositions can be tested only within the context of the arbitrarily defined system: there is no balance scale upon which one may independently establish equilibrium.

Finally, systems analysis seems always to move toward a more abstract level, while our research problems and data are always concrete. Consequently, the application of the approach will always pose conceptual and methodological problems, as is illustrated in the following evaluation of Mitchell's work:

Perhaps better than any other work in political science The American Polity demonstrates the capacity of structural-functional analysis to provide the foundation for unlimited insights, and at the same time demonstrates the need for reduction of insights into more orderly interrelated statements of relationships.⁴⁰

A more candid comment would be that Mitchell does best by his data when he ignores his system.

The Utility of the Political Systems Approach for the Politics of Education

We have argued that, to date, students of educational politics have found the system approach unrewarding. In this section we point to some advantages that the political systems approach seems to offer "educational policy scientists".

Description, Again

One may readily be attracted to the ease with which the popular systems model (e.g., input-conversion process - output - feedback) can be used to suggest the larger canvas, the total picture, of which one's study is but a piece. Moreover, the basic model has been elaborated sufficiently that any of the problems of our concern may be shown to be a sub-heading of one or another system. Moreover, the approach does facilitate organization of data and telling of the tale.⁴¹

As our field is plagued with description at the expense of analysis, this is not high praise. However, Meranto and others have been able to place their research problems in a larger perspective and have provided useful descriptive studies with assistance of the systems approach.

A New Perspective

In a field in which theory is synonymous with perspective, rather than explanation, we perhaps do not require another perspective. In this instance, however, perspective has some potential of leading to improved analysis.

The least interesting aspect of the new perspective provided by systems analysis is simply the new concepts: words that do in fact alter and enrich under-

standing. "Feedback" and "input" have become trite, but other systems - related concepts, such as "step-function" and "sub-system dominance", can still work their magic.

As suggested above, systems approaches are useful tools for describing the general picture. It should be noted here that our studies at the micro or sub-system level must be viewed in relation to the larger or macro system if we are to have more complete understanding.

Explanations at the macro and at the micro level are complementary. We can dispense with neither if we want a complete explanation.

Although an individual loan may be best understood.... by looking at the motivation of the lending officers, the lending policy of the bank can best be understood by an analysis of the bank's situation within the economic system.⁴²

Functionalism is new to educational politics as it is to political science, and if systems analysis is the vehicle we can but welcome it. Despite the limitations of functionalism we must agree with Scribner's conclusion regarding his pilot study.

First it (function-systems paradigm) is unmistakably a new way of looking at what school boards actually do. School board research typically has been focused upon the characteristics of individual board members, the role relations of school board and superintendent and some questionable a priori assumptions about school board performance.⁴³

Questions, such as "What is the function of the school board in the local educational system?" are unescapable in the political systems approach. Our previous research has been based largely upon the presumption that we knew the answer to this question.

To the writer, the most interesting opportunity provided by political systems analysis is that of analytically examining those areas previously considered outside the political sphere. For example, using Easton's definition of political, and the familiar input-output model, we may now consider questions that could not be analyzed usefully with traditional concepts of politics (meaning partisanship, elections, and legislation). It is now feasible to examine the "politics of instruction", as well as politics of curriculum, the local board, or the PTA. Scribner has shown that the local board may be viewed as a system. Many of our "apolitical" institutions may be examined as political systems or subsystems: may be examined with regard to their function in the larger political system, or as a system of functionally related components processing inputs into system outputs (meaning authoritative allocation of values) and responding to modifications in their environment.

An Analytic Paradigm

What is being claimed is that the political systems approach provides an analytic paradigm for educational politics. It provides a way of ordering complex situations to make them manageable, and it suggests a set of functional questions to be asked about the actors in the systems.⁴⁴ In other words, the political systems approach may assist in analysis of our systems in the same general manner as Merton's paradigm for functional analysis: it tells us where to look and what to look for. A difference is that we are just beginning to ask the questions of the validity and utility of political systems analysis which Merton asked of functionalism.⁴⁵

Comparative Studies and Politics of Education

The use of a common conceptual framework and a common set of functional questions would appear to be a boon to students of educational politics. Many of the writers in the "field" are represented in the special issue of PDK devoted to "politics of education" ⁴⁷ This compilation of ideas and studies provides positive affirmation that our field has no conceptual framework; it has neither methodology nor boundaries; it is a problem-defined field rather than a conceptually-defined field.

Adaption of the political systems model as an analytic paradigm would provide a conceptual framework and a unifying, if general, theme: how are values allocated in the educational system? How does the educational system relate to the larger political system? These are the questions which suggest the implied paradigm in our present work. Being hidden, we are not required to examine them or relate our findings to them. (One might suggest that a meaning of academic "discipline" be the responsibility of scholars to make explicit, and be faithful to, their conceptual framework.)

The political systems approach would seem to have considerable potential for comparative research. It is exciting to imagine Schoolmen in Politics or State School Politics as comparative studies: studies organized around a common conceptual framework and a common set of question regarding the functioning of the state policy system. One may easily point to the possibility of using conceptual schemes, such as that developed by Scribner to study school boards as functional-systems, as comparative studies.

Comparison has long been a means for description. It does not, as the opponents of analogical systems have convincingly demonstrated, permit logical explanation or prediction. Of the political systems analysts reviewed here, only Kaplan believes prediction possible through systems analysis. He has been able to make predictive statements regarding the stability of international systems and has tested and refined them through computer simulation of historical epochs.⁴⁸

Our concern must be narrower and more pragmatic. For most of us there is but one educational system of concern, and it is the system we wish to study. Therefore, we may use the systems approach as a conceptual framework which provides a model, a definitional question, boundaries, and analytic concepts and questions. It can assist us in describing and comparing systems that are important to us; it may help us to understand but it will not lead to a theory of politics of education. We will not be able to explain in the formal scientific sense; we will be able to tell what happened, and informal speculation about why it happened.⁴⁹

Concluding Statements: The Necessity of Hard Choices
and a Plea for Modesty

It was my original intention to prepare a polemic against the excessive use of "systems analysis" in educational administration, especially in the area of educational politics. That I have presented a disappointingly temperate discussion is clear to the reader of the preceding sections, and some explanation is in order.

It seems clear, as I have tried to show, that use of the political systems approach to the educational policy system has been frustratingly unproductive. We can't say anything new, but it takes us even longer to say it. While I did not offer an evaluation of political scientists' efforts to use the systems approach, their work might well be characterized in the same vein. (Easton has no data and one can't imagine moving from his system to data collection; Mitchell has data but, in my opinion, uses his systems "theory" only to provide chapter headings. Kaplan's work is theoretical and empirical, but he acknowledges that the results will be disappointing to those with a problem-solving inclination. Almond must leave his system to provide explanations.)

Given the evidence, how can one still remain, even timorously in the political systems analysis camp? My explanation is that our non-field, politics of education, needs the political systems approach if it is to progress beyond random consideration of political "problems". The distinction I like to make, often resulting in even greater confusion, is that we need to move away from the analysis of "things political" (e.g., election of board members) to political analysis

of "things educational" (e.g., the relation of the educational system to the larger society, the allocation of values within the educational system). We very much need an analytic paradigm to show the relationship of things interesting to us to the rest of the world, and to provide a common core of questions that will distinguish our efforts at political analysis from simple journalism.

I hold that political systems analysis can do these things for us better than any alternative approach and much better than no approach. I don't argue that this will be the use to which we put systems analysis, and I don't support exaltation of the mystical potency powers frequently attributed to systems analysis.

To take advantage of the political systems approach requires that we make hard choices and I am not confident of our willingness to make them.

Hard Choice One

We have to be willing to accept the concept of system and make it central in our studies. I don't believe that systems "really" exist and have a life of their own. But to benefit from the systems approach we must be willing to devise ways of examining the functional relationships of all actors in the system. This requires conceptual and design labor beyond what we are accustomed to. Easton questions whether anything less than the political systems may be studied as a system; Kaplan argues that only specific systems (Easton's sub-systems) may be studied; we must do the compromising and adapting.

Hard Choice Two

We have to adopt a comparative methodology. Research according to the systems approach means comparative research. Case studies, unless they are designed to be cumulative, do not allow one to establish "controls" or "manipulate" variables.

Hard Choice Three

We must be willing to close our system for analytic purpose; we must be willing to work with a stated definition of the system rather than constantly making do with ad hoc explanatory variables.

Hard Choice Four

We must be rigorous in defining our systems and their boundaries. Otherwise there can be no comparison, hence no analysis. But the cost of rigorous definition may be higher than we can tolerate. Scribner's school board boundary is illustrative:

That is, the school board consists only of official and ex-officio members who meet the statutory requirement for school board membership. And it is only at a legally constituted meeting that a board acts as a part of the school board system. (Italics ours.) ⁵⁰

Such a definition precludes of course, the insightful studies such as those provided by Crain ⁵¹ and Vidich and Bensman ⁵² in which much of the explanation for the policy making process of the board lies outside the "legally constituted" meetings. Boundaries of our systems need to be as narrowly defined as Scribner's. They must be defined, however, and if we are unwilling to settle for legalistic definitions we

must undertake a great amount of conceptual work. One can imagine Crain's study in a system framework, but would the cost of conceptual labor be worth the gain in understanding?

A Plea for Modesty

I have tried to present a reasonable interpretation of the political systems approach to educational politics. I find nothing in my discussion that would provide us with any reason to assume that because we had systems analysis we really had something. Adopting the political systems approach may allow us to save ourselves, it should not be expected to make much difference to the world.

The emperor can not be clothed: political systems analysis can not provide an explanatory, empirically verifiable, theory of the educational policy system. Given our need for an analytic paradigm of much less pretention and the contribution of political systems analysis to this end, however, this conclusion is not as distressing as it might seem at other times or other places.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 For case material on the application of operations research to management see Stanford L. Optner, Systems Analysis for Business Management (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1960).
- 2 An excellent exposition of general systems theory is provided in Mihajlo Mesarovic (ed.) Views on General Systems Theory (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964).
- 3 Although not his only or most significant criticism, this line of thought is advanced by Herbert J. Spiro, "An Evaluation of Systems Theory" in James C. Charlesworth (ed.) Contemporary Political Theory (New York: Free Press, 1967), p.164.
- 4 Ibid., p. 170. He further states: " "The others are merely analogic systems or anthropomorphized systems -- unless their raw material is being absorbed by the political process, and then they may be looked upon and analyzed as subsystems of the political system." "
- 5 Vernon Van Dyke, Political Science: A Philosophical Analysis (Stanford University Press, 1960), p.161.
- 6 R.C. Buck offers a devastating criticism of psychologist James Miller's understanding of systems theory and especially of Miller's indefensible use of analogy. See his chapter, "Logic of General Systems Theory" in Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven (eds.) Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Vol. I, (University of Minnesota Press, 1956), pp. 223-239.
- 7 See Morton A. Kaplan, Macropolitics (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), pp. 75-76.
- 8 Maure L. Goldschmidt, "Democratic Theory and Contemporary Political Science," Western Political Science Quarterly, XIX, 3, Supplement, 1966, p.7.
- 9 William C. Mitchell, Sociological Analysis and Politics: The Theories of Talcott Parsons (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 140-163.

- 10 Criticism has been somewhat diluted because its major target is Behaviorism, of which systems analysis is perhaps but a symptom. A recent book in which many contributors make passing derogatory remarks about systems analysis is Charles A. McCoy and John Playford, (eds.), Apolitical Politics: A critique of Behaviorism (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1967).

There was heavy criticism of operational research systems such as PPBS at the September, 1968, meeting of the American Political Science Association (especially by Allen Schick and Bertrum Gross), but literally no attention was given political systems analysis.

- 11 Henry Sikariel is one who both objects to behaviorism and continues to use "political system" in the traditional sense. See his Promise of Politics (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966).
- 12 This is the burden of much of The Political System (New York: Knopf, 1953) and the introductory chapter of A Framework for Political Analysis, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1965).
- 13 For Easton, " "The behavioral approach testifies to the coming of age of theory in the social sciences as the whole, wedded, however, to a commitment to the assumptions and methods of empirical science." "The Current Meaning of Behaviorism", in James C. Charlesworth, The Limits of Behaviorism in Political Science. (Philadelphia: ANNALS, 1962), p.25
- 14 William Flanigan and Edwin Fogelman support the contention that functionalism is new to political science in Don Martindale (ed.) Functionalism In the Social Sciences (Philadelphia: Annals, 1965), p. 111:

"At no time has functionalism been a prevalent mode of analysis in political science.....

Functional analysis has come to political science only recently, and relatively few major works in the discipline have explicitly developed a functional analytic scheme, " "

- 15 See especially the introductory chapter in G.A. Almond and J.S. Coleman (eds.) The Politics of Developing Areas (Princeton University Press, 1960).

- 16 Glendon Schubert, Judicial Policy Making, (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1965), p.3 .
- 17 See the chapters by Robert T. Holt, "A Proposed Structural - Functional Framework for Political Science," and Flanigan and Fogelman, "Functionalism in Political Science," in Don Martindale (ed.) Functionalism in the Social Sciences (Philadelphia: ANNALS, 1965).
Also, H.V. Wiseman, Political Systems (New York: Praeger, 1966), pp. 214-220.
- 18 In Framework, Easton declares that his is not simple structural-functionalism. His conceptual debt to functionalism is heavy, nevertheless. Richard S. Rudner, Philosophy of Social Science (Prentice-Hall, 1966) offers a description of functionalism that is sufficiently broad to seem necessarily a part of any system concept.
19. R. Jean Hills, The Concept of System. (CASEA: University of Oregon Press, 1967), p. 3.
There are other "bare essentials" definitions available:
 - (1) " " the study of a set of interrelated variables, as distinguished from the environment of the set, and of the ways in which this set is maintained under the impact environmental disturbances"". (Kaplan, Macropolitics, p.57.
 - (2) " "... a specified set of elements; a specified set of relationships among elements; the implication of certain relations from the knowledge of other relations, and movement of the system through time because of comparison of element relationships. " " Anatol Rapoport, "Some Systems Approaches to Political Theory" In Easton (ed.) Varieties of Political Theory (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp.129-130.

Hill presents a lucid discussion of the system concept. Unfortunately, he is not concerned here with political systems.
- 20 Karl W. Deutsch, The Nerves of Government (New York: Free Press, 1963).
- 21 Easton's trilogy includes The Political System (1953) A Framework for Political Analysis (1965) and A Systems Analysis of Political Life (New York: John Wiley, 1965).
- 22 Morton A. Kaplan's major works are System and Process in International Relations (New York: John Wiley, 1957) and Macropolitics (1969)

- 23 Almond and Coleman (eds.) Politics of Developing Areas.
- 24 William Mitchell, The American Polity, (Glencoe: Free Press, 1962).
- 25 Glendon Schubert, Judicial Policy Making.
- 26 Specifically, Gabriel A. Almond, "Comparative Political Systems," Journal of Politics, XVIII (1956).
- 27 Schubert, Judicial Policy Making, p. 4.
- 28 It should be emphasized that we are not undertaking to criticize the studies themselves, but the contribution of political systems analysis to them.
- 29 Jay D. Scribner, "A Functional-Systems Framework for Analyzing School Board Action," Educational Administration Quarterly, Vol. 11, No. 3, (Autumn 1966), pp 204 - 216.
- 30 Ibid., p.212.
- 31 Philip Meranto, The Politics of Federal Aid to Education in 1965, (Syracuse University Press, 1967). Easton and Mitchell have been discussed above. Wahlke's book is a role-theoretical model developed from study of five state legislatures. John C. Wahlke et.al. The Legislative System (New York: John Wiley, 1962).
- 32 R. L. John's, "State Organization and Responsibility for Education: in Edgar L. Morphet and Charles O. Ryan (eds). Implications for Education of Prospective Changes in Society (Denver: Eight State Project, 1967) pp: 245-267.
- 33 Isn't this, after all, what Philip H. Coombs does in his The World Educational Crisis: A System Analysis (Oxford University Press, 1968)?
- 34 Consider the following (John's italics):
" " Only those social systems that have attained dynamic equilibrium and achieved a steady state can expect to survive in a rapidly changing world. " " loc cit, p. 250

" " Finally, local school systems are not likely to be abolished.....
This is not true of state departments of education." " loc. cit, p. 266

- 35 Meranto, Politics of Federal Aid to Education 1965, p. 8.
- 36 Kaplan, Macropolitics, p. 26
- 37 Frank J. Munger and Richard F. Fenno, Jr., National Politics and Federal Aid to Education (Syracuse University Press, 1962).
- 38 Kaplan, Macropolitics, p. 71 .
- 39 Kaplan, System and Process, p. 4.
- 40 Flanigan and Fogelman in Martindale (ed). Functionalism in the Social Sciences, p. 118.
- 41 Meranto acknowledges description to be the chief contribution of the system approach.
 " " A second basic point is that the systems approach is essentially descriptive in character. It attempts to indicate the relationship among various parts of the political system; thus, at this stage, it is more useful as an organizational scheme than a predictive model. " "
Politics of Federal Aid to Education, p. 8.
- 42 Kaplan, Macropolitics, pp. 30 - 31.
- 43 Scribner, "Functional - Systems Framework", p. 213 .
- 44 Kaplan and others have much greater expectations for the systems approach. In addition to providing explicit categories and integration of variables, Kaplan suggests that the approach will generate hypotheses. Macropolitics, p. 58 .
 We have proposed something less than this because we are concerned primarily with analysis and not theory construction. For most of us the construction of political theory is, to use a recently resurrected expression, a pipe dream.
- 45 Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, Rev. (Glencoe: Free Press, 1957), Especially pp. 12-15.
- 46 Ibid., p. 50

- 47 Phi Delta Kappan 49, 6. (February, 1968) It is interesting that the cover of this issue is in the traditional partisan politics mold -- a donkey and elephant. This is much to narrow a definition of our concern. and if often irrelevant.
- 48 Kaplan, Macropolitics, pp. 234-242
- 49 For one discussion of the meaning of explanation and the distinction between scientific description and explanation, see Gordon J. DiRenzo, "Toward Explanation in the Behavioral Sciences", in DiRenzo, Concept, Theory and Explanation in the Behavioral Sciences (New York: Random House, 1966).
- 50 Scribner, "Functional-Systems Framework", p. 205.
- 51 Robert Crain, Politics of School Desegregation (Chicago: Aldine, 1968).
- 52 Vidich and Bensman, Small Town In Mass Society, (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1958).